



SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

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In Support of Funding for the DEP's Invasive Plants Control Program

**Testimony of David Sutherland - Director of Government Relations
Before the Environment Committee – February 17, 2010**

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy's 28,000 members, I am here today to urge the committee to appropriate \$100,000 to keep the Invasive Plants program at the Department of Environmental Protection alive. In recognition of the severe threat that invasive plants pose to our lakes and rivers and other natural habitats, this committee appropriated \$500,000 annually for this program in the 2008-2009 budget. No funding was included in the current budget, and **we urge you to appropriate at least some minimal funding to enable this vital program to continue.**

What's the Problem with Invasive Plants?

Thousands of plants have been introduced to New England over the past few centuries from other regions or continents. Most of them do not present problems for natural habitats. Several dozen of these alien species, however, are a grave threat to forests and other natural areas, because they are able to aggressively out-compete native plants, and are not nearly as valuable for native animals which evolved with those native plants. Instead of a mosaic of many species of native plants and animals, our forests and wetlands become dominated by far fewer species of plants and animals, and therefore less healthy. Many lakes and rivers have become impenetrably clogged with aquatic invasive plants.

How are Invasive Plants Spread?

Invasive species are spread into new areas by many means, including landscaping and the sale of plants between countries and states; inadvertently through the transport of other products; seeds or plant fragments transported on boats from one water body to another; and by wind, water, and birds.

What Can We Do?

Reducing the spread and impacts of invasive plants will require many different approaches, including physical removal, education of nursery consumers, rapid detection of response to invasions by new species, and restrictions on sale of certain plants. **Many municipalities, land trusts, lake associations and other organizations are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to remove or control invasive plants.**

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The funding this committee had approved in the 2008-2009 budget provided for the coordination of agency staff and hundreds of volunteers across the state who are working to control the spread of invasive plants; educational activities such as production of poster exhibits of banned plants (posted where plants are sold), remediation of invasives such as the clean-up of the aquatic invasive Hydrilla from the Silvermine River, inspections for illegal sales of banned invasive plants in pet shops and nurseries, and a Grants to Municipalities Program to encourage management of invasive plants on public use lands.

We recognize that it is impossible to fund the invasive plants grant program, but the response to the grants program's first round indicated how widespread the concern about invasive plants is in the state. Despite a very short time period to submit applications and a required match, 38 municipalities applied for grants.

We thank this committee for your past support for this critical issue, and urge you to maintain at least minimal funding to enable this program to continue to assist our communities in addressing a growing problem.